

## [Tom McClure]

1

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [104?]

Page #1

FC

Tom McClure, 70, was born on his father's stock farm in Wise co., Tex. He was taught to ride a horse at an early age, and did routine cowboy work at age 10. He was employed for two years by Andy Coston, a beef contractor who furnished beef for the Cherokee Indian Nation. His job was to assist in buying and gathering together of cattle and trail driving the herds into the Indian Territory.

He was later known as 'The sixshooterless sheriff', after he was elected sheriff of Wise co., Tex., because he made arrests without fire arms, including some noted killers and fugitives from justice. He served four years. He later moved to Jones co., where he was also elected sheriff and served four years. While in office, he arrested his opponent in the election, for shortage of funds the [preceding?] term, and took him to the penitentiary.

Sometime after leaving Jones co., he moved to Forth Worth, Tex., where he served eight years as a police captain in the North Side District. He gave up active life when he retired from the police force. He lives at 1009 [N. W.?] 15th St., Fort Worth, Tex.

His story:

## Library of Congress

"Yes sir! I know something about the range when a man had to be red-blooded to stay in the saddle, unless he was the cooky. [?] that, many of the cookies were real sons of the saddle, but had to get themselves all stove up, after riding a wild mustang hoss, or having a steer gore him when he was trying to bulldog it.

"It wasn't a big ranch I was born on, my dad's stock farm in Wise co., Tex., but proportionately it would look bigger today on account of many of the big ranches disappearing. I was born into this world on Feb. 12, 1867.

My ambition to be a cow poke caused me to always be trying to ride a hoss, when I was a kid. C.12 [???] 2 I really don't recall the exact age I started to riding, but I was a full-blown cow poke before I was nine years old, and was busting broncs when I was nine. Of course, the broncs weren't so very salty, that I was allowed to ride, but you couldn't have told me that I wasn't a bronc stomper right, then.

"By the time I was 13, I'd learned enough about handling critters to be a pretty valuable hand, and wore the regulation clothes that the grown-up punchers did. My dad had some handmade boots made for me, and bought me the rest of the stuff, so I was tricked out right royal. Of course, I saved dad some money on another cow poke's salary so he made by letting me go ahead with the work.

"In '81, one of dad's friends got a government beef contract to furnish the Cherokee Indian Nation with beef. His name was Andy Coston, and he'd been a trail driver, bronc stomper, and all before he'd got this contract. He hired me for 30 a month and chuck, to go with the rest of his cow pokes. It was given five hosses to go in my string, the same as the rest of them, and was treated in every way just as if I'd been an old trail hand.

"By spring, in '81, Andy had all of his hands going around with him to the different roundups of the ranchers in Wise county, and cutting out critters that Andy chose to traildrive away. These critters were all brought to the White Spur Valley, in Jack county,

## Library of Congress

and joined with some beef Andy bought in west of the place. This was a good holding ground, and we used it two years. 3 "About a week after the spring roundups were over, we begun the trail drive to the Cherokee Nation. The trip carried us through Montague county, and we crossed Red River at Red River Station, then followed the old Chisolm Trail to the nation.

"Driving a herd of three and four-year-old steers, over 3,000 head of them, through the Indian Territory, was really an interesting trip.

"I don't recollect the name of the tribe that first met us as we crossed the river, but they mighty nigh caused a stampede before we got them to quit scarin the critters in the herd. We waddies were either on the flank or in the rear, running the stragglers away from the water, when the waddy out pretty close to the front noticed the herd was getting skittish and the leads turning back into the herd. When he got to the front, there was a bunch of Indian squaws, waving red blankets and walking toward the herd.

"Andy happened to be about a hundred feet behind the waddy, when he started out, so he followed him. Since Andy was one of the old hands on the range, he'd learned the sign language and could powwow, so he talked to them and found that they wanted toll for the herd to pass through their territory. The toll they wanted was some meat, so Andy picked out about four head, had a man drive them to one side, then the herd passed on by. Before we were out of sight of the village, them redskins had already picked one of the critters so clean that some of the bones were showing. They acted like a bunch of cannibals. I guess they'd 4 been without meat for quite a spell so they were just meat hungry.

"Before we got to the Cherokee Nation, we were stopped at at least 10 villages in the same manner. By the time we arrived, that herd was picked clean of scrubs. The herd was about the best Andy could buy in the first place, because he picked out real beef to make the trip; then, after he'd paid toll to the redskins, he had cleaned the herd out to the very

## Library of Congress

best. Even if all the animals had looked the same to a veteran like Andy, by the time they'd made a few miles some of them would begin to straggle, just like human beings. you take 100 men, and about five of them will be much weaker than the rest, and will straggle behind in a march or a walk. The trail driver had to figure this into his profit and loss, but Andy just paid the Indians a toll with these animals. So he really gained, since he didn't have to part with the animals that could make the grade.

"This stampede business is about the worst thing a cow poke has to put up with. He can hunt a rustler up, and put him out of commission, but he can't do anything about a stampede because it takes so little to put the cattle on a stomp. A skunk can just get close to a herd, and it'll take off like an express train. Only two things can stop a stomp.

"One is, if the cow pokes can get the herd to milling. That way, the herd will run itself down in a circle and wont run off a cliff, or into a river and get drowned. You see, once a herd goes on a stomp, it runs 'til some of the critters get tired and got to bawling. The first bawl will be answered by another critter, and the whole stomp will be stopped dead in less than five minutes. 5 "The way the boys get a herd to milling is for one of them to get out in front, if he can, and turn the leaders, if there are two, and keep them turning 'til they're running in a circle. I can't think of a more dangerous trick than to try to get in front of a herd, because a mistake is always fatal. A ranny's hoss can step in a gopher hole, fall, and the herd runs right over the hoss and rider, stomping them right into the ground; or, he can run off a cliff, and the critters will come piling right down on him, killing the critters and the ranny too. Just a lot of ways to make the turning of a herd a dangerous thing. On the other hand, if a herd can't be stopped or milled, it will run itself down if it takes 25 miles to do it, unless they run over a cliff before they get run down, then the beef loss runs into thousands of dollars.

"Before reaching the nation, we had to ford the most treacherous river in the world - the South Canadian. It has quicksand all up and down it; and a rain will cause a wall of water that's sometimes at least eight feet high, come sweeping down the river channel that wont

## Library of Congress

have but two to three feet of water in the main channel. The herd got to milling right in the middle of the river, and we lost 10 or 12 head before we got it straightened out. you see, the leader got out into the middle, then decided he couldn't make it to the other side so he turned around to try to make it back. In coming, back the others tried to follow him, and he had to go around those following him, the others turned, and they got to milling.

"I forgot to mention that the river was at flood stage at this time, and pretty fast. To break the mill, we had to take 6 our clothes off, ride our hosses out to the middle, and turn the leader right. You can imagine how easy it was when I describe the other things about it. the critters were all longhorn steers, with horns from two to four feet long, and some of them getting tired and trying to crawl up on top of the other's backs, besides being packed so close together that a man could almost have walked from one side to the other on their backs. That would have been a good trick to have pulled to have gotten to the leader, but if they happened to part under you, you'd go down.. Another nice thing about the mill was that, when a steer in trying to get somewhere and another critter gets close, it gets afraid that the other might stop him, so he slashed out with those big horses of his and tries to gore the other critter.

"After my second trail drive to the Cherokee Nation. I decided I wanted to go back home, so I lit right out. After I was at home, in Wise county, for about two weeks, I decided to go to Fort Smith, Ark., where my mother's folks were. One of the men was in charge of the fort there, and he hired me as a peace officer for the Indian Territory.

"Some way or other, I'd always gotten along alright without a gun, so I decided to keep it up as long as I could. Many's the time, after that, that I went into the Territory and arrested rustler, outlaws, murders, thieves, and so on, without a gun. I went on this theory, that every man has some good in him, and I just talked to him with that idea in mind. If I'd have gone in there with the purpose of getting the drop on some of those fellows, I'd have never lived to tell the tale, because some of them were as fast as lightning on the draw, and natural shots 7 that could hit what they took the trouble to aim at. In fact, it didn't seem

## Library of Congress

like some of the had to aim. They just pointed the pistol in that direction and hit their mark. Then, some of them were men that outweighed me by a hundred pounds or more, and had fought for their lives in brawls on the frontier. I'd have stood mighty little chance in a brawl with that type of man, but yet I arrested quite a few of them, and brought them in to stand trial under Issac Parker, 'The Hanging Judge', who was the only court for all five of the Indian nations.

"On just one trip alone, Frank Mackinac, J.W. Milliard, Bruce [Quigley?], and myself, brought back 41 prisoners. The other fellows toted guns, but I went unarmed all the time. I took my share of these prisoners, though, even if I didn't have a gun. We put them all into five wagons and went on in into Fort Smith without a hitch.

"In the bunch were eight murders, (two of them were hung and the rest sent to the pen for life) whiskey peddlers (it being a Federal offense to sell whiskey to the Indians), and cattle and hoss thieves. The two murders who were hung were Jim[?] and Albert Odell. They were hung on a scaffold that was used to hang 14 in one day. That scaffold still stands at Fort Smith, and a person can go out to see it at any time he wants to.

"The worst assignment I ever got was to get Bully July, and negro ex-slave, that turned out to be a murderer, and a bad one, too. I guess Bully was about the worst character that ever run loose in the territory. He was a fast shot, and a champion saloon 8 brawler. Many's the time he'd killed a man that he'd agged on 'til the man jumped him, then killed him in the brawl. That was an old stunt of the bullies that killed many a good man just because the bully wanted to show out.

"Bully July had murdered a man and a woman, in this case, and threw their bodies in a cave in the Arbuckle Mountains. That cave is now a tourist spot, and is called 'Dead Man's Cave'. It's located near where [rdmore?], Okla. is now. [Ardmore?] wasn't a city in those days. Some way, or other, we had to have those bones of the couple, to connect the

## Library of Congress

murder up, and it fell to me to get them.. I went down and raked them all up, and put them into a sack. I then took the sack to the court.

“There are some things connected with the capture of Bully that I don't want to mention, because they would drag some good men's names into the mud, and that's a practice I try to avoid when the men have really reformed and trying to make good citizens. The court's records will show that I brought the negro in, and everybody knows I never used a gun.

“After I got pretty well fed up with the peace officer work. I quit and went back home to Wise county. I ran for sheriff in 1899, and was elected. I served 'til 1903, and got my 'rep' for being the 'Gunless Sheriff' while in office there. Of course, that takes me pretty well out of the range picture, except when I arrested drunk cow pokes, or something.

“About the most interesting thing that happened to me, along about that time, was the rodeo at Seymour, Tex. It was the 'Cowboys' Reunion', and was held in 1900. There were more people 9 there than you could shake a stick at. Among the outstanding folks there was the Indian Chief, [uanah?] Parker, and his five wives. I recall now that one of them, his favorite, was called 'Too [Hicey?]'. I don't recall how many bucks he had with him, but there were a big bunch of them.

“About the most comical thing I ever saw happened in the roping contest. A prize was put up for the fastest time in the roping, and one of the fellows that entered just knew that he had the thing in the bag. His name was Rufe Buckley, and he owned a sure enough cow hoss. It was a chestnut sorrel, and had been busted from a wild hoss to a bronc by a man in the business that was really good. He knew his stuff when it came to busting hosses. I don't recall his name, to save my life, now, but he didn't do anything else but bust hosses for cattleman.

“Anyway, Rufe came swaggering out to his hoss, mounted with a flourish for the grandstand, then rode toward the center of the arena, twirling his [rista?]. You could tell from his actions that he was good and knew it. When the steer was released, he made

## Library of Congress

his throw in quick time, and made a dandy good one. Up 'til the steer reached the end of the [rista?], everybody thought he had it in the bag for sure, because the hoss was a good pegger and had already sat down to keep the steer from jerking him over, and to throw the steer.

“Well, the unexpected happened. Instead of the steer being thrown, it jerked the hoss over and kept going, dragging the hoss across the arena. Rufe would have been killed with the hoss if some of the boys hadn't of headed the steer off and stopped it 'til one of them could untie the riata. Rufe had swaggered on, but he walked off as if he might have been disappointed in something.

“The one that won the roping prize was Berry Pursely, a young rancher who had really won his spurs in different roping contests as a top notch roper. His prize was a \$150.00 saddle. That rodeo was held out on the open plain, and had the biggest crowd in the history of those days.

“After I served my term as sheriff of Wise county. I went to Jones county, where I went into business. In 1910, a number of my friends asked me to run for sheriff, so I decided to run and was elected. The man I ran against was the sheriff the preceding term, and made a hot race because he sure wanted back in again. His name was N.C. Farrell, and he helped me make a record no other sheriff in the world has got. After I beat him, I took him to the pen for a shortage in the county's funds. The name that his enemies called him by was 'No Good Farrell'. They got that from his initials. ['N.C. '?] He's still living up there, and they tell me that he's made a fine citizen since coming back.

“There were several things that happened to me in Jones county, but one of them has been written up so much I don't guess you'd be interested in it much. It was about how I'd trailed a gang of kidnappers 'way up into Canada, then captured them. It was given a whole page by the Fort Worth Record, and they wrote up some more stuff about me being 'The Gunless Sheriff'.



## Library of Congress

“One of the things I've never talked about much was the time I had to go out and get Sam Young, a rancher that was a real 11 bad man. He had the rep of doing just anything he felt like, and had never met his match in a gunfight. The reason I had to go get him was that the Abilene Southern Railroad run through his ranch and the trail scared his cows. Another thing was that it cut his ranch in half. He finally got mad and piled two cords of wood in the right of way tracks on the main line and stopped the passenger train. He told those who got out of the train that no more trains were to run through there anymore, as he was going to kill anybody that tried it. Well, the men believed he meant what he said, because he sat right up on top of the road with a double-barrel shotgun, and two sixshooters in his hands.

“It happened that the son of the owner was the conductor on that train, and he came for me. I went out there, without a gun, climbed up on top of the wood pile with him, talked to him, took his guns away from him, and took him to town and the jail.

“Of course, Sam wasn't in but a little while 'til bail was made for him, and he got off without much trouble. I finished my term and came to Fort Worth here, where I was made Captain of the Worth Side Jail, and I served eight years there. I retired in 1923, and haven't done much since then. I live at 1,000 Worthwest Fifteenth St., and if you want anything on the kidnapping, or anything else I can help you on, just come out and see me at any time.